

Department of Philosophy  
The Colorado College  
Fall 2007 - Block 3

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PHILOSOPHY 248  
**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will be, in part, an introductory survey of Western social and political philosophy and, in part, a historically informed inquiry into the problem of understanding contemporary democratic life. Some contemporary writers have argued that, when judged against the backdrop of a tradition of thought descended from Plato, our age is one of moral decay, intellectual decline, and political disarray, while others assert that the contemporary era is marked by the construction of democratic ways of living that have the potential to be rich morally, intellectually, and politically. The course will explore how and why such opposing interpretations have arisen, concentrating especially on what reasonable and unreasonable claims each position entails and why one may or may not come to support either position.

COURSE GOALS

The primary aim of the course will be to give students an overview of Western social and political philosophy, focusing on key texts from four historical moments: the ancient Athenian democratic polis; the early modern constitutional state; the modern liberal market order; and contemporary pluralist republics. In each section of the course, we will examine two or more competing philosophical treatises that question the then-dominant understandings of society and politics, claim to establish some better or truer interpretation of organized human life, and suggest means for reforming or transforming society and politics in light of that interpretation. Topics to be discussed may include: the problem of truth and the role of justice in politics; the questions of whether natural laws can be identified and of what roles or obligations common people might have in constitutional states; the difficulties of understanding the social and political significance of individuality and the place of equal rights or common goods in the social order; and the problematic roles of intellectuals, patriotism, eroticism, and diversity in democratic orders. The exact topics examined, however, will be shaped by the questions raised in our discussions.

Along the way, the course will introduce students to the writings of several influential political and philosophical thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Bentham, and Marx, as well as two contemporary thinkers, the recently deceased Allan Bloom and the very much alive William Connolly.

In addition to giving an overview of social and political philosophy in the West, the course's historical inquiry will provide the class with historical and philosophical tools useful for examining a contemporary problem that may be as old as any Western tradition of thought: the possible conflict between rational order and democratic expression. To some, including thinkers as ancient as Plato and as recent as Bloom, democracy poses threats to order and reason; while to others, including in some ways Aristotle, Rousseau, and Connolly, citizen participation and public deliberation promise to make the notion of democratic order a living reality. This course will seek to encourage students to look closely at all sides of such arguments and to begin thinking about what democracy may mean in a contemporary context.

Throughout the term, the course will offer students opportunities to develop their own critical reading, thinking, and writing skills.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

*Reading.* This course will have a heavy yet quite rewarding reading list. Students will be expected to keep up with the reading throughout the block. Plan to spend a fair amount of time reading *before* attending class and, at times, re-reading after class. In general, texts are to be brought to our meetings so that they may be referred to in our discussions.

*Course Meetings and Discussion.* Most course meetings will consist largely of discussion, with some lecturing from time to time. Individual students may be assigned to lead discussions or to take part in debates on particular topics periodically. Students should expect to attend class meetings consistently and punctually; and to discuss the subjects and texts under investigation in a civil manner. Performance in discussions will strongly influence the participation grade.

*Writing and Examinations.* Students will write two short papers and a take-home final examination. The two papers and the final exam are to be typed (i.e., word-processed), double-spaced, and annotated in accordance with accepted norms of scholarship (that is, with citations and notes). Unexcused late papers will be downgraded one step every four hours tardy.

#### REQUIRED TEXTS

Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 1992)  
 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 1998)  
 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Hackett, 1994)  
 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Hackett, 1987)  
 Peter Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2001)  
 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (Simon & Schuster, 1988)  
 William E. Connelly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Basil Blackwell, 1988)

#### ADDITIONAL READINGS – ON ELECTRONIC RESERVE

Robert Darnton, "Philosophy under the Cloak" and "Philosophical Pornography," in *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, chaps. 1 and 3 (W.W. Norton, 1996)  
 Margaret C. Jacob, "The Materialist World of Pornography," in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Zone Books, 1993).  
 Jeremy Bentham, "Of the Principle of Utility," "Of Principles Adverse to That of Utility," "Of the Four Sanctions or Sources of Pain and Pleasure," "Of Human Actions in General," "Of the Properties Given to a Lot of Punishment," from *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), ed. Paul Lyon (Classical Utilitarianism Web Site):  
 <<http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/poltheory/bentham/ipml/index.html>>  
 Robert E. Goodin, "Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy" and "Government House Utilitarianism," in *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995).  
 Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge, 1982)  
 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *The German Ideology*, part 1, and *Capital*, chap. 1, sect. 4, "The Fetishism of the Commodities and the Secret Thereof," from Marx-Engels Internet Archive  
 <<http://www.marxists.org>>

Other supplemental readings may also be assigned as the block unfolds. All additional and supplemental readings will be available as electronic reserves. The website for this course E-Reserve readings may be accessed directly by going to: <http://coloradocollege.docutek.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=145>

#### GRADING AND ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Grades will be assigned on a 100-point scale and weighted in the following manner:

|                                     |                             |            |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1. First paper draft (4-5 pages)    | Mon., 5 Oct.                | 2%         |
| 2. First paper (4-5 pages)          | Fri., 9 Oct.                | 25%        |
| 3. Second paper (5-7 pages)         | Fri., 16 Oct.               | 30%        |
| 4. Final reaction paper (2 pages)   | Mon. or Tues, 19 or 20 Nov. | 3%         |
| 5. Take-home final exam (4-5 pages) | Wed., 21 Oct.               | 20%        |
| 6. Participation                    |                             | <u>20%</u> |

TOTAL: 100%

Regular, timely attendance and active participation in discussion are essential parts of the course – worth 20% of your final grade. Unexcused absences and regular tardiness will be noted and will affect grades negatively. Students who miss three or more classes for any reason may be required to withdraw from the course. If you have a good reason to be absent or late, notify me as soon as possible. Be sure to write a note (so that I remember!), as well as to speak to me.

The schedule of assignments appears above and below. You will be expected to meet all of these deadlines. Exceptions will be made only in extreme and unavoidable circumstances. If you expect to submit a paper or exam late, contact me immediately. Either see me in my office, or give me a note or an e-mail message explaining your circumstances. If religious observances or other serious obligations conflict with the course schedule, let me know as soon as possible, and we can work out an alternate schedule for you.

Plan to attend class for the whole period, focusing on coursework throughout. “Attending for the whole period” means, among other things, that you will not leave class to visit the restroom, get a drink of water, chat with friends, and the like. We will take a break about after about an hour and 15 minutes – that is when you may leave class (except in an emergency, of course). If you have a good reason for arriving late or leaving early, please notify me in advance. ***As a courtesy to all, please turn off all telephones and electronic devices while in class, and if you bring a notebook computer to class, please do not surf the web while we are in session.***

#### HONOR CODE

Students will be expected to abide by the Honor Code. Among other things, the Honor Code specifies that you will be responsible for producing all of your own work and that you will always cite the works or ideas of others used in your work. However, discussing your ideas and your writing with others is *not* a violation of the Honor Code. In fact, it is a good idea to compare your ideas and writings with those of others and to ask others for criticisms of your work. Using other people’s ideas can also be a good idea – ***if*** their ideas are good ***and*** you credit the authors for developing the ideas.

#### DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you believe you are eligible for learning accommodations as the result of a qualified disability, please contact me privately. If you believe you may have a disability that impacts learning, and you have not identified yourself to the College’s Disabilities Services Office, please do so immediately. You will find their office in the Colket Student Learning Center at Tutt Library. You may also contact the College’s learning consultant, Dr. Bill Dove, at the Learning Center or directly at extension 6168. I will make appropriate learning accommodations in accordance with the Disabilities Service Office’s instructions.

#### OFFICE HOURS/COMMUNICATION

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-3 p.m. I am also generally in my office (130 Armstrong) in the afternoon. The easiest way to meet with me would be to make an appointment after class, or contact me via e-mail ([dmccernerney@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:dmccernerney@coloradocollege.edu)). I can also be reached at my office phone (extension 6564).

***Note that this entire syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.***

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, TOPICS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments are to be completed *before* class.  
 Class will meet from 9:20 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., with a 15-minute break  
 \* Indicates electronic reserve reading

### *I. Truth, Justice, and the Athenian Polis*

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|---|---|
| Monday, 29 October                            | <u>Introduction – Political Philosophy and the Athenian Polis</u><br>Reading: Begin reading the <i>Republic</i> as soon as possible!  |
| Tuesday, 30 October                           | <u>Questioning Common Sense and Searching for Justice</u><br>a. Plato, <i>Republic</i> I-II, pp. 1-59.<br>b. Plato, <i>Republic</i> III-IV, pp. 60-121.   |
| Wednesday, 31 October                         | <u>Philosophic Truth and the Problem of Ordinary Life</u><br>a. Plato, <i>Republic</i> V-VI, pp. 122-185.<br>b. Plato, <i>Republic</i> VII, pp. 186-212.  |
| Thursday, 1 November                          | <u>Idealism Confronts Politics and Pleasure</u><br>a. Plato, <i>Republic</i> VIII-IX, pp. 213-263.<br>b. Plato, <i>Republic</i> , X, pp. 264-292.   |
| Friday, 2 November                            | <u>Nature, the Household, and Civic Orders</u><br>a. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> I-II, pp. 1-64.<br>b. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> III, pp. 65-100.   |
| Monday, 5 November                            | <u>On Good and Bad Orders, and the Philosophy of Ruling</u><br>a. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> IV-V, pp. 101-174.<br>b. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> VI-VIII, pp. 175-242.<br><b>FIRST PAPER DRAFT DUE AT 11 PM</b> |
| Tuesday, 6 November<br><b>**Meet 1-3 PM**</b> | <u>Reading Day / Writing Workshop</u><br>a. Read Hobbes.<br>b. Writing workshop (1-3 p.m.)  |

### *II. Nature, Enlightenment, and Obligation in the Early Modern European State*

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|-----------------------|--|
| Wednesday, 7 November | <u>Man and Reason, Religion and Nature</u><br>a. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Intro. and chaps. 1-6, 9-10 (through sect. 18), 11, pp. 3-35, 47-52, 57-63.<br>b. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chaps. 12-16, pp. 57-105.<br><i>Afternoon</i> : individual meetings to discuss drafts   |
| Thursday, 8 November  | <u>Of Nature, Government, Commonwealth, and Churches</u><br>a. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chaps. 17-18, 20-22, 24, 26, 28-30, pp. 106-118, 127-155, 159-165, 172-189, 203-233.<br>b. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chaps. 31-33, (through sect. 3) and 42 (through sect. 11), pp. 233-251, 333-339.<br><i>Afternoon</i> : individual meetings to discuss drafts |

- Friday, 9 November Authority, Sex, Mechanics, and Modern Philosophy  
 a. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chaps. 43-44 through sect. 3), 46, and Review & Conclusion 397-412, 453-468, 489-497.  
 b. \*Darnton, "Philosophy under the Cloak" and "Philosophical Pornography," pp. 3-21, 85-114; and \*Jacob, "Materialist World of Pornography," pp. 157-202.  
*Suggested reading*: Connelly, pp. 16-40.  
**FIRST PAPER DUE AT 6 PM**
- Monday, 12 November Nature in Question  
 a. Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," in *Basic Political Writings*, Part One, pp. 25-60.  
 b. Rousseau, "Inequality," in *Basic Political Writings*, Part Two and Notes (skim the notes), pp. 60-108.
- Tuesday, 13 November The Modern State in Question  
 a. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* I-II, pp. 140-172.  
 b. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* III-IV, pp. 173-227.  
*Suggested reading*: Connelly, pp. 41-67.
- III. Philosophies of Market Society**
- Wednesday, 14 November Maximizing Individuals, Directing States, or Narrowing Minds?  
 a. \* Bentham, selections from *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, pp. 1-49.  
 b. \*Robert E. Goodin, "Utilitarianism as Public Philosophy" and "Government House Utilitarianism," pp. 3-27, 60-77; and \*Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," pp. 129-144.
- Thursday, 15 November Radicalizing Nature, Philosophy, and Politics  
 a. Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 1-100.  
 b. \*Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," pp. 1-3; *The German Ideology*, pp. 1-79; and "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," pp. 1-14.
- Friday, 16 November Reading & Writing Day – No Class Meeting  
 a. Write your paper.  
 b. Start reading Bloom and Connelly.  
**SECOND PAPER DUE AT 6 PM**  
**FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM DISTRIBUTED**
- IV. Democracy, Order, and Diversity in the Contemporary Era**
- Monday, 19 November Confronting Modernity / Contemporary Barbarism?  
 a. Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, pp. 25-88, 157-194.  
 b. Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, pp. 336-382.  
**GROUP ONE REACTION PAPERS DUE**
- Tuesday, 20 November Modernity, Difference, and Democracy  
**\*\*Class Meets 1-3:15 PM\*\***  
 a. Connelly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, pp. 1-15, 68-85.  
 b. Connelly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, pp. 116-75.  
**GROUP TWO REACTION PAPERS DUE**
- Wednesday, 21 November Take-Home Final Examinations  
 Due at noon.

TWO-PAGE SUMMARY AND REACTION STATEMENTS

In the last week of the block, students will write one short, informal summary-and-reaction statement. Group one will be assigned to write on Alan Bloom; group two on William Connolly. Each student's piece should be divided into two parts:

- a) Summary: stating what strikes you as the most significant or interesting point (or two points) made in the assigned text (½ – 1 page); and
- b) Reaction: explaining what that aspect of the reading leads you to think about (1 – 1 ½ pages).

These statements should be the equivalent of 1½ - 2 word-processed, double-spaced pages – so about 375-525 words long. The format is informal: your statement should list **your name**, the **date**, the assignment (**the authors, titles, and chapters/pages discussed**), and **your own title** at the top. You should divide the statement into two parts (“Summary” and “Reaction”), one summarizing the reading's most important point or points and the other giving your reaction to the reading. You need neither quote nor cite the text, though you can, if you think it important to do so. The statements should be written in clear, Standard English prose. The style may be informal.

As you write, don't try to summarize *all* the points made in the reading. Focus on one or two points that seem highly significant *to you*. This point or these points ought to have led you to think about something that seems important, significant, or meaningful. This point or these points need not be central to the reading, although in most cases I expect they will be. You may well write about some minor aside that an author makes, if that aside has led you to begin thinking. Just be sure to **explain clearly and accurately what the author says** when you claim the authors argue something. Also, explain your reaction, your interest, your thought process. When I say, “explain,” I don't mean saying that something is “interesting” or it has “made you think.” Instead, **identify what in particular strikes you as interesting, or what specific problems or ideas the reading raised for you, and then give the reader some sense of why any of these ideas seem important or significant to you.** What has led you to react in the way you have?

This assignment is meant to focus both on the reading and on your thoughts insofar as they relate to the reading. For the second half of the paper, you may explain why the authors' claims seem to you wrong-headed, or really cogent; why they excite or repel you; why they have made you think of something in a new way, or why they seem to point to a dead end. You may explain why the piece seems really bad or really good to you. This assignment lets you think aloud, as it were. However, the first part of the paper should accurately summarize what the author says.

The assignment also, I hope, will further three other aims. First, it will give you a chance to work on mastering the reading, as well as to demonstrate to me that you have done the reading. If there are parts of the reading that you don't understand, then write about the problems you have in seeing the author's points. I'll try to address those problems, either directly, by commenting on your paper, or indirectly, in class. Second, since we will be at the end of a packed term, the assignment will allow you to concentrate on one of our two closing books. Third, your comments may provide food for thought in our class discussion, as well as for you when you prepare for the oral final.

These papers will be graded minimally: check, check/minus, minus, zero. I may add no or only a few comments.

- Check: a) the paper clearly and coherently develops an idea; b) it also accurately and fully summarizes what the reading says; and c) it convincingly and clearly shows why this point or line of thought is significant to you.
- Check/minus: the paper demonstrates some effort, but it is incomplete or unbalanced.
- Minus: the paper is just thrown together, it lacks careful thought, or it is wildly inaccurate about the reading.

Checks will earn full credit (**2%**), check/minuses partial credit (**1.5%**) and minuses (**1%**) minimal credit. A check is the equivalent of an “A+” already for 2% of your final grade.

No late papers will be accepted. Finally, all papers will be e-mailed not only to me, but also to the entire class, for use in our discussions and in studying for the final.